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"Wherefore... Let Us Press On"

by T. Austin-Sparks

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jan-Feb 1930, Vol. 8-1.

Hebrews 6:1. The Tremendous Importance of Spiritual Maturity

The Apostle is distressed. As he writes this letter it is as though from time to time he meets something that almost pulls him up dead. Three times at least he suspends his main theme and puts in a parenthesis. The section from verse eleven of chapter five to verse three of chapter six is such a digression. What is this thing, that makes his going so difficult and strenuous?

It is not the theme that is difficult!

It is not in the writer himself! It is certainly not a lack of urgency or importance! The issues are paramount. The whole significance of the Person, Incarnation, Cross and Worth of the Lord Jesus is at stake!

No, the difficulty is in those to whom he writes. Not that they do not know the Lord. They "have been enlightened"; they had "tasted of the heavenly gift"; had "been made partakers of the Holy Spirit"; had "tasted of the good Word of God"; and "the powers of the age to come"; and yet, and yet, there is an immaturity, a failure to "go on," a spiritual infancy which threatens to be fatal in respect of all the ultimate purposes of their heavenly calling. It is this arrested growth, prolonged babyhood that holds back the spirit and the pen of the Apostle, and would even put restraint upon the Holy Spirit. (See the paragraph mentioned.)

The trouble was seen by their being always occupied with those matters - "principles" - which are meant to be built upon, not toyed with. Perhaps the trouble was deeper than that; it was a dwelling upon the *things* as such and a failure to discern their real spiritual meaning and implications. There are two maxims which it will be well for us to have settled quite early. One is that we can only "go on" in the Holy Spirit. The other is that the Holy Spirit can only take us on as the foundations and "principles" are laid and settled. There are many of the Lord's children who, after many years of being such, are under arrest, paralysed, ineffective, and almost counted out because they are in a state of unsettlement about the "first principles." With some it is a matter of "faith toward God"; with some it is the matter of baptism; with some it is "eternal judgment." Let it be clearly recognised that on all such matters the Holy Spirit Himself will demand an absolute settlement and will not take us on to "full growth" until the "principles" are established. Why are there so many old-aged infants, elderly dependants, spiritual "Peter Pans," amongst the Lord's people? Why is it that after years of work and service so many come to a place where they are beaten and helpless because of being "without understanding" in that sense in which the words are used? Col. 1:9; 1 Cor. 14:20; Matt. 15:16.

It may be - and certainly sometimes is - because at sometime the Spirit's requirement as to some basic principle was unheeded, argued aside, discussed, passed, or definitely refused. That is a sin against the Holy Spirit - while it may not be *the sin* - and that sin is bound to find us out sooner or later. What we have to say here as we proceed will make clear what we mean by this being found out. The letter to the Hebrews marks the transition from the fragments of the Prophets to the fulness in Christ, this fulness is spiritual and is consequent upon spiritual revelation which leaves all the "earthlies" behind and comes into the "heavenlies," even in the matter of Divinely constituted institutions, which nevertheless were but as "schoolmaster" to lead to Christ and maturity. We can still go on with the "things" and stand still as to the "meaning." For instance, it is *impossible* to have a *revelation* of the true nature of the Church - the Body of Christ - and remain a denominationalist or sectarian without joining issue with the Holy Spirit. It is equally impossible to remain a Jew as such (in the matter of Judaism) and be a member of Christ. Once the Holy Spirit has spoken or enlightened, tremendous crises are reached on foundation principles, and these crises if not settled soon will come up later. The Holy Spirit never moves a fraction from His original premise.

Now, while this is all so important, it but opens up for us the way to a closer consideration of what spiritual maturity is.

There are three letters which deal especially with the matter of unduly delayed maturity, or spiritual childhood continued in too long. They are: "1 Corinthians," "Galatians" and "Hebrews."

Corinthian Immaturity

The believers at Corinth had evidently made some inquiries of the Apostle Paul concerning certain particular matters which they thought were the cause of trouble and bad spiritual conditions. The Apostle postponed his dealing with these until he had dealt with what he himself was convinced was the cause of the trouble. This was not the particular "problems" about which they were concerned, but that which lay behind them and much more. They were occupied with the externals of the faith both as to personal, domestic and church affairs. The Apostle goes to the heart of things and makes it perfectly clear that their trouble was arrested spiritual development. Thus he mentions some of the symptoms which prove this. The first one was partisanship. They had men in their eye. Human selection, favour, preference issuing from temperamental reactions caused them to "hive off," form

circles, parties around the mannerism, 'line of things,' or make-up of this man and that. Some would prefer the mystical and poetical to the practical. Others the opposite. Some would take up with the subjective line of things and decline the objective and vice versa. And so on and on. Then there would be the men themselves with what was liked and what was disliked. Concerning all this, the Apostle says "I could not speak as unto spiritual but as unto babes, I fed you with milk" (3:1,2). The fundamental fault with all this was that with them the Lord Jesus had not become pre-eminent; it was not Him always in view, to whom they gathered, whom they were seeking. It was not a matter of what of the Lord Jesus had this one and that one to impart. It was the vessel not the treasure; the channel not the stream. In effect the Apostle says that it is a mark of real spiritual growth and maturity when the Lord's people are not influenced by the instrument as such, but have their hearts directed toward Himself, and are asking all the time, "What has this one and that one of the Lord?" So in this matter as in all others the remedy presented is a putting of the Lord Jesus in His place, which is the supreme place, and the place which excludes all human obtrusions, for or against.

The heads of these Corinthians were projected toward the servants of the Lord instead of their hearts being set on the Master. Divisions are so often childish, and when looked at from a point of greater spiritual advancement are seen to be so. Then it is perfectly clear that human elements played all too great a part, and if only the Lord Himself had been the dominating reality and object of concern, things would have been different.

Then these Corinthians were all too much taken up with "gifts," experiences, demonstrations, manifestations. "Tongues," for instance, had come into prominence in a manner out of proportion to the general work of the Spirit. The display gifts were holding the stage of their interest and concern. This also is related to their immaturity. Infants like outward effects. Children like sights and sounds. The Apostle again implies that this means that the Lord Himself is not the object, but the things. What a test this is! How many there are who must have "signs and wonders," sensations, evidences, outward proofs, things seen and touched and proved by the senses. This is all infancy, and as we go on with the Lord He woos us from this realm and personally takes the pre-eminence. It was in relation to all this that the Apostle appended or concluded with that which has become such a common form of "benediction" - "The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," over against works; "The Love of God," over against or deeper than signs and "gifts" as such; "The fellowship of the Holy Spirit," over partisanship, and distinctions among men. If in the relationship and connection of these words as originally used they were a little bit as effective as they are now so largely employed as a formula, what a difference there would be in the testimony of the Lord Jesus in the world.

Oh, beloved friends, let us put the Lord Jesus in His place, and keep our eyes on Him and off men and things, and the enemy will have less ground upon which to dishonour His Name among men. In this matter "let us press on to full growth."